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ABSTRACT

Indicators that the prospects for meaningful curricular reform are not optimistic are developed in this paper. The first premise is that research on curricular reform has been limited in its applicability to practitioner concerns. Another dilemma in the translation of research on curricular reform for practitioners is the continuing wide gap in the views of theorists versus those of curriculum implementors about curriculum planning. In addition, research has not adequately addressed the differing change process in elementary versus secondary schools, and the problem of motivating teachers. The second and third premises deal with the record of curricular reform (in the form of new conceptions of schooling, schoolwide improvement processes, and specific curricular reforms), which is not great when general patterns rather than exemplary practice are viewed . The final premise is that the critical problem for curricular reform in the next few years will be human energy, commitment, and insight instead of money. (MLF)

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PROSPECTS FOR COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM REFORM: A PERSONAL VIEW

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This paper is a personal view of the prospects for meaningful curricular reform in the next few years. Its tone will not be an optimistic one. Underlying my thoughts are 4 premises as follows:

1. While research on curricular reform has made great progress in the last decade, the message given by researchers to practitioners has been incomplete, mixed and unresponsive to several critical practitioner concerns.
2. Much exemplary curricular reform has been carried out. However, exemplary reform has been infrequent and short-lived and will likely be so for the next few years.
3. In general, across all schools and teachers, curricular reform as substance and, especially, as process has been flacid and will likely remain so in the next few years.
4. The major deterents to curriculum reform in the next few years will not be money. Instead, human energy, commitment and insight will remain the critical problems in curricular reform.

I will develop these premises in the rest of the paper, and conclude with implications for research and practice.

Research on the curricular reform process had made great strides in the last ten years. Several complementary reviews help summarize this research. Fullan (1982) has

described factors which directly affect implementation in the following outline:

A. Characteristics of the Change

1. Need and relevance of the change
2. Clarity
3. Complexity
4. Quality and practicality of program (materials, etc)

B. Characteristics of the School District Level

5. The history of innovative attempts
6. The adoption process
7. Central administrative support and involvement
8. Staff development (in-service) and participation
9. Time-line and information system (evaluation)
10. Board and community characteristics

C. Characteristics at the School Level

11. The Principal
12. Teacher-teacher relations
13. Teacher characteristics and orientations

D. Characteristics External to the Local System

14. Role of government
15. External assistance

In contrast, Loucks and Lieberman (1983) organize their useful summary of the curriculum reform literature around what House(1979) calls the cultural view of curriculum implementation. Their summary draws on grounded insights such as:

"Since teachers learn their craft essentially from experience, many styles develop in the process of interpreting the vague goals of schooling." (p. 129)

"Each school is a unique culture. Generalizations or "how to's" are often not specific enough because of these differences." (p. 129)

Loucks and Lieberman (1983) offer three key concepts (developmentalism, participation and support) to communicate their view of the evolutionary, unique process which curriculum implementation should take in local settings.

I see in practitioner responses to these two types of reviews some sad results. Practitioner response to research like Fullan's review, and to Joyce and Showers (1980) review of training research, has been, despite the authors' cautions and great wisdom, to develop a "marching orders" practitioner style. A rigid set of steps or factors are applied whether the local situation calls for that change approach or not. Moreover, the research is often poorly understood and is overly generalized in its application.

Conversely, the positive, creative application of concepts such as developmentalism, participation and support is very difficult for practitioners who have not had extensive interaction with the research, and researchers such as Loucks and Lieberman.

This is by no means a criticism of these researchers; I can't imagine finding a more talented or resourceful pair. I just find that local curriculum reformers, except for a special small set, have difficulty grasping and applying the nuances of concepts like developmentalism and participation. While there is no doubt that the number of qualified local curriculum implementors has greatly increased in the last three years, it is also true that this number is only a fraction of the set that will be needed to implement extensive curricular reform.

Another dilemma in the translation of research on curricular reform for practitioners is the continuing wide gap in the views of theorists about curriculum planning versus those views of curriuclum implementors. The recent excellent ASCD Yearbook on fundamental curriculum decisions edited by English (1983) helps to address this problem. While many of the chapters are very well done, the yearbook reflects the divergence of language, frameworks and approaches between curriculum development theorists and curriculum implementation researchers. For example, it is hard to see how practioners are to integrate developmentalism with the more linear planning/implementation models of earlier chapters in the Yearbook.

Finally, local curricular reform leaders frequently report two needs which I feel the research has not adequately addressed. The first is the differing change process in

elementary versus secondary schools. The other is the problem of motivating teachers who basically need but don't want, nor see the need for curriculum reform.

The second and third premises of this paper, taken together, were that, with occasional exceptions, the practice of curriculum reform was not widespread nor elegant. In this context I am referring to two things: the substance of reform which is to say bold, well-conceived, broad curricular improvements actually used at the local site, and the process of reform which is to say, on-going, intentional, orchestrated efforts to bring about these broad improvements. Here it is useful to distinguish several types of curricular reforms:

- New conceptions of schools that would include IGE, model schools guided by Trump and Georgiades and alternative schools of several kinds.
- Schoolwide curriculum improvement efforts that sought to stimulate locally defined broad curriculum change
- Specific curricular innovation ranging from new math, special science approaches, new textbook or material often linked with new teacher approaches, to new instructional strategies.
- Individual teacher-generated innovations.

I want to comment about the extent of reform, in practice, associated with each of these types of curricular reform.

Reforms involving new conceptions of schooling were rare in occurrence and typically didn't last more than two to three years unless special networking and assistance resources were available to the local site. Deal (1975) reports on the short half-life of alternative schools. While such schools met all or most of his six criteria for being alternative schools, the schools quickly passed through a series of stages leading to school closure, renewal or return to conventional school patterns. Special alternative schools like Adams High School in Portland also had a brief existence as a truly different high school.

IGE schools were continually being serviced by a well-organized and effective technical assistance network. Still the turnover of schools, especially outside Wisconsin, was substantial. Moreover, several researchers have questioned the extent to which all teachers at an "IGE" school could actually be thought of as doing the IGE program.

The extent of curricular reform of schools in schoolwide improvement processes is an interesting issue regarding the extent of actual change and how such change can be conceptualized. Berman and Gjelten (1982) report on the California School Improvement Program (SIP), a state-funded effort to stimulate comprehensive, locally-directed, curriculum reform in elementary and secondary schools across the state.

The findings illustrate the diversity of outcomes at the local school level resulting from the program. These outcomes can be thought of as:

Student-centered improvement
- -education outputs
- -student environment
- -pedagogical quality

Organization-centered improvement
- -physical resources
- -quality of work-environment
- -organizational health

Community Relations

General School Quality

As means to achieving these outcomes, the program orientation at the school ranged from: 1)the program as a catalytic process, 2) the program as a specific fixed programmatic content, to 3) the program as primarily a funding source. The SIP program had differential effects in : 1) elementary versus secondary schools, 2) in schools where a process catalyst, programmatic focus or funding source SIP orientation were used, and 3) on different schooling outcomes.

While the final report is not yet ready, several relevant findings can be presented from an interim report (see Berman and Gjelton):

1. The great majority of schools were able to engage in either a programmatic or process orientation to school improvement.

2. About 60% of the elementary schools and 40% of the secondary schools were improved and another almost 40% maintained at current quality despite funding and other shifts in the state.

From these findings it can be concluded that: 1) the reform process can be engaged in by many schools, and 2) the reform process led to substantive improvement and change in a sizable number of schools. Even so, only 19% of all teachers involved in SIP reported their school had undertaken a "major new departure" (Berman et al., p.8) and only 7% of schools were judged to have made great improvement as a result of SIP (Berman and Gjelton, p. 15). Consequently, one can be somewhat skeptical about seeing locally-directed school improvement as the vehicle for substantial curricular reform.

Specific curricular innovations are so numerous that it is difficult to judge their contribution to the balance regarding curricular reform. While the majority of change process research has focused on innovation level rather than schoolwide research, and more specifically on federal or state funded innovations adopted by local schools, there is no comprehensive assessment as to the extent such innovations were generally being adopted by schools. The research studies focused mostly on how adoption took place or the conditions under which successful adoption happened.

One can infer, however, from numerous studies that exemplary processes or results were relatively rare. One can see that innovations approved by the NDN were not implemented at user sites with great fidelity or effectiveness. Hall and Loucks do report studies of successful implementation of local innovations but I think we must be quick to point out the special expertise for enhancing implementation in places like Jefferson County, Colorado. The general picture, I believe, shows specific curricular innovations being implemented by only some of the teachers, with numerous cases of "mechanical use" implementation, and with fairly low real institutionalization and long-term retention.

In short, I believe that the record of curricular reform in the form of new conceptions of schooling, schoolwide improvement processes and specific curricular reforms is not great when viewed as general patterns rather than exemplary practice. The prospects for improvement are not promising either, for several reasons. External funding of curricular reform has clearly diminished as has district financial resources available for curriculum development and instructional supplies. Policy approaches emphasizing the nurturing of local change process have given way to increased effort to mandate but not facilitate curricular change such as high school graduation requirements, course requirements and testing. Few efforts to undertake new conceptions of schooling exist; change efforts seem focused on technological

integration such as curriculum alignment approaches.

Teachers are weary of change and are more demoralized. Some good teachers have left and fewer talented, creative teachers are entering the system. Those experienced teachers that remain speak more of burnout than school excellence.

Yet several factors suggest curriculum reform may improve. There has been a great increase in the expertise level of local curricular reformers and districts, as districts, seem to have regained the curricular reform initiative from externally funded projects. While districts must respond to numerous external madates, still they respond as a district not a project. Morevover, the stark shock of pupil ethnicity shifts and budget cuts is subsiding. Pupil shifts continue, budgets are tighter, but the shock is past and better planning is at least possible.

This leads to my last premise for this paper: that the critical problem for curricular reform in the next few years will be human energy, commitment, and insight instead of money. In a sense, money has never been the issue. Berman and McLaughlin (1977, 1978) found that funding level was not the critical factor in explaining successful implementation or institutionalization. Joyce, Bush and McKibbon (1981) report that staff development funding level was not a major factor in program success. Moreover, the critical curriculum change research findings as summarized in Fullan (1982) and Loucks and Lieberman (1983) point to human factors as critical elements. Even the sociological/cultural view of curricular change processes describes support in human support terms.

This view fits with the comments I hear from local curriculum change leaders about the dilemma of how to motivate the many teachers who are perceived to be content with their teaching and their curricular practice but who are seen by others as being less than fully effective.

In making this point about human energy, commitment and insight, I am making many assumptions. Let me acknowledge at least several. I am assuming that external mandates can be turned to local school advantage through the application of local staff insight and energy. I am assuming that sufficiently helpful innovations and resources are available for adaption to local settings by school staff with the commitment and insight to do so. Finally, I am assuming, unlike Sieber (1975), that schools at the classroom level are not so vulnerable to external pressures that curricular control is out of the school's power. Schooling goals may be vague and school contexts unique, but such issues can be satisfactorily handled with commitment, energy and insight about the substance and process of curricular reform.

If the premises in this paper are correct, what are the implications for curricular reform research and practice? For researchers I would propose:

1. Strenuous efforts to synthesize research for practitioners and to increase collaborative

research and training efforts. Our collaborative efforts must reflect developmentalism and participation of practitioners.

2. Honest talk about the realities of teachers, especially the problem that many teachers don't feel a need to improve or to engage in an improvement process.

For policy makers I would propose:

1. A more realistic pacing of curriculum reform mandates coupled with greater cooperation, developmentalism and participation with local districts and schools.
2. More realistic expectations about what schools can accomplish coupled with comprehensive, not technological, views of curriculum, teachers and schools.

For local districts I would propose:

1. Identifying and strengthening the talents and utilization of curriculum reformers knowledgeable about both the process and substance of curricular reform.
2. Choosing broad-based yet feasible curricular reforms nurtured by the factors of successful district and school implementation and institutionalization.

Finally, I would appeal to teachers, especially

those who truly need to engage in professional growth activities, that your energy and full commitment are needed if curricular reform is to be more than an illusion.

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